3: Imperial Gazetteer G-3 (1889-95) 1909 AV1 Kashmir AV1



that the old bridges had weathered many a serious flood. Not long ago two of the bridges, the Habba Kadal and the Zaina Kadal, had rows of shops on them reminding one of Old London Bridge, but these have now been cleared away.

Srinagar to Gilgit.

The distance by road from Srīnagar to Gilgit is 228 miles, and the traveller can reach Bandipura at the head of the Wular Lake by boat or by land. The Gilgit road, which cost the Kashmīr State, in the first instance, 15 lakhs, is a remarkable achievement, and was one of the greatest boons ever conferred on the Kashmīri subjects of the Mahārājā. Previous to its construction supplies for the Gilgit garrison were carried by impressed labourers, many of whom perished on the passes, or returned crippled and maimed by frost-bite on the snow or accident on the goat paths that did duty for roads. The journey to Gilgit before 1890 has been aptly compared with the journey to Siberia. Now, supplies are carried on ponies and the name Gilgit is no longer a terror to the people of Kashmīr.

From Bandipura a steep ascent leads to the Raj Diāngan pass (11,800 feet), a most dreaded place in the winter months, when the cold winds mean death to man and beast. Thence through a beautifully wooded and watered country, past the lovely valley of Gurais, down which the Kishangangā flows, the traveller has no difficulties till he reaches the Burzil pass (13,500 feet), below which the summer road to Skārdu across the dreary wastes of the Deosai plains branches off to the north-east. This is a very easy pass in summer, but is very dangerous in a snowstorm or high wind.

Descending from the Burzil the whole scene changes. The forests and vegetation of Kashmīr are left behind, the trees are few and of a strange appearance, and the very flowers look foreign. It is a bleak and rugged country, and when Astor (7,853 feet) is left the sense of desolation increases. Nothing can be more dreary than the steep descent from Doian down the side of the arid Hattu Pīr into the sterile waste of the Indus valley. It is cool at Doian (8,720 feet); it is stifling at Rāmghāt (3,800 feet), where one passes over the Astor river by a suspension bridge. The old construction was a veritable bridge of sighs to the Kashmīr convicts who were forced across the river and left to their fate—starvation or capture by the slave-hunters from Chilās. A little cultivation at Bunji relieves the eye; but there is nothing to cheer the traveller until the Indus has been crossed by a fine bridge, and 30 miles farther the pleasant oasis of Gilgit is reached.